

# Country of the Week: Benin

Benin has a rich cultural history comprised of strong oral traditions, vibrant and diverse music, and unique cuisine. Although many people speak French, Beninese literature is closely linked to an older, spoken history shared over generations. Benin's music scene draws inspiration from native folk music to funk to soul, creating a true fusion of sounds. Throughout Africa, Beninese cooking is admired for its flavorful sauces and fresh ingredients.

Benin remains deeply connected to its exciting history and culture, while its people are also focused on shaping a promising future. Benin's wonderful YALI Network members are part of that.

This week we are featuring three inspiring stories of civic engagement, education advocacy, and support for women and girls. Join their efforts and bring impact to your own community by exploring the YALI Network Online Courses.

Regularly hosting #YALILearns events, Natacha Agbahoungba finds joy in sharing YALI Network Online Courses with her community in Porto-Novo. "The YALI Network has been an amazing resource provider to my community and to me," she states.

Natacha emphasizes the importance of civic engagement, saying "I decided to hold a monthly #YALILearns offline event to empower more young people in my community." These events (pictured above) invite local youth to participate in educational courses, and introduce attendees to a supportive network of peers. "This initiative has proven to be successful, and once we finish an offline course, we help participants connect and access their certificate through the YALI website."

Is civic engagement an important issue to you and your community? Find out how to get involved by liking the YALI Network Facebook page, and access free online trainings, virtual events, and more by visiting this page.

Animated teacher and mentor Folakè Diane Edea hopes to shape an educational curriculum that teaches English as a second language throughout Benin. She remarks on her own professional experiences, saying "I know exactly how important it is for a leader to be at least bilingual."

Folakè organizes weekly outreach with English clubs where she shares her personal experience as a YALI Network member to encourage and engage students. "As a result of my conferences and mentorship programs, many English clubs have increased their membership, and many young people have sent positive testimonials about how their speaking skills improved," she explains. "Moreover, many young people have been selected for international scholarships thanks to their level of English. All in all, English has helped a lot of young Beninese."

Noting that the rights of women and girls are highly important to her community, Folakè started her own NGO called Global Language and Education for Développement that mentors high school students, especially girls, to become bilingual before graduating.

She wholeheartedly believes that her work in the classroom will shape a better future for Benin and for Africa: "If primary and high schools can continue to teach both languages efficiently, I believe that in 20 years time Benin will produce leaders who distinguish themselves both by their leadership

and by their capacity to share important experiences with fellows around the globe.”

Aurelie Adam Soule Zoumarou’s calling is to work with young women. Once a shy girl herself, she focuses on helping young women identify strengths, build self esteem, and, ultimately, foster leadership skills.

Serving as a youth coach to many women, Aurelie “reinforces the importance of serving their communities, their country, and their continent in each of their actions.” She frequently uses the YALI Network tools and resources before speaking engagements or presentations that reach youth in Benin.

Aurelie also organizes events to empower women and girls (pictured above) and to discuss the obstacles and challenges they commonly face throughout life. “It was an emotional moment when all these young women were talking about their challenges, their expectations, and their pursuit of goals in life,” she remembers. “All participants left the workshop with a personal development book to help boost their leadership capabilities.”

Join Aurelie and members like her by signing up for the YALI Network. You’ll receive email updates, opportunities to collaborate with other young leaders, and access to helpful products and programs such as YALI Network Online Courses and #YALILearns events!

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